

Ten Guidelines for First Year Ensemble Directors

Dr. Brad Meyer

1. TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF:

Eat healthily, sleep at least 6-8 hours, and exercise. Taking care of yourself takes time, but the time you put into keeping yourself healthy will allow you to stay more mentally focused and physically energized throughout your day. Make time for yourself. Also, plan free time and vacations the way you schedule your rehearsals. Free time helps you recharge/re-energize yourself and will help you avoid burn out at your job.

2. COMMUNICATE SAFELY AND EFFECTIVELY:

Learn which way students/parents receive communication best (GroupMe, Remind, etc.) and use it. Take the time to become proficient in whatever method of parent/student communication your program uses, and use it consistently – whether it is weekly Charms emails, regular Google Classroom announcements, or nightly Remind101s. Always remember: group-oriented communicating is much safer for you as an instructor than one-on-one communication, which can lead to inappropriate communication (or at least the appearance of inappropriate communication). A good rule-of-thumb for any written communication is to never write anything you would not feel comfortable discussing in a deposition.

3. SCHEDULE WISELY:

Use calendars (and calendar apps) constantly, consistently, and effectively. Your iCal/Google Calendar/Fantastical 2/Calendars 5/Outlook/Timepage should look like a piece of art. Schedule in travel time, color coordinate your calendars (personal vs. professional vs. school-related, etc.), and put in deadlines (TMEA submissions, TSSEC deadlines, grant/funding deadlines, etc.). Many calendar apps can be shared with students/parents/administrators/colleagues to help avoid rehearsal/performance conflicts.

4. MAKE LISTS, LOTS OF LISTS:

Use Wunderlist/Notes and make different categories: current concert repertoire, future concert repertoire, future chamber ensemble repertoire, conference clinic topics, article topics, possible future clinicians, potential students (with all their contact information and family names), instrument needs, to-do lists, ensemble goals (1-year, 3-year, 5-year, and 10-year), etc. Having your lists organized and easily available at all times will allow you to have more “ah-ha” moments that you can record, which will help you and your ensemble progress more quickly. The more you can plan ahead for your ensembles and yourself, the more direction and focus you and your program will have towards your goals.

5. LEARN TO DELEGATE:

In the beginning of your job/career, you will need to do a lot of things yourself, but the more you can delegate small tasks (restringing marimbas, loading cases, setting up chairs and stands, etc.), the more attention and energy you can give to big-picture items. Establish easy-to-follow systems for how you want your program to work. Also, having student leaders can be an effective way of getting tons of small tasks accomplished while also giving students a hierarchy that allows them to advance among their peers.

6. DON'T LET A BAD LESSON/REHEARSAL/CONCERT RUIN YOUR DAY:

Learn what you could have done better from negative situations, but bringing home your work (especially the negative aspects) will only cause you and your relationships to suffer. Everyone needs to vent, and doing so in small amounts infrequently can be healthy; however, consistently discussing only the negative aspects of your job will result in a negative outlook on your job, be it you personally disliking your job or others believing that you do not like your job. Use friends, loved-ones, and family as a healthy sounding board, but then move forward. Focusing on the negative can easily become a living feedback loop of self-pity.

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7. BE YOUR STUDENTS' MENTOR, NOT THEIR FRIEND:

Students need a mentor much more than another friend. Sometimes it is hard to put students' long-term goals over their immediate need for validation/attention, but if students/young adults can learn how to be dedicated, have a consistent work-ethic, and overcome challenging hurdles (emotionally, mentally, and physically), they will more likely become successful, independent adults. Also, never give out your personal phone number to students, and know your school's/district's rules regarding text messaging and social media contact with students. This is important to protect you from losing your job and other damaging ramifications.

8. SHARE YOUR GROUP'S SUCCESS:

If you do not promote your group, who will? Use all the different types of media/social media (newspaper, blog, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.) to get your program in the public's eyes and ears. Make sure you are an advocate to all shareholders. Reach out to administration, colleagues, parents, and future students to share news of the growth, success, and accomplishments of your program. A lot of schools/districts have media outlets that can be harnessed for your program's benefit as well.

9. BE KIND TO EVERYONE:

It is easy to keep in mind the people you are directly involved with: students, colleagues, administration, etc.; however, some of the most important people to your program's success are the people that work behind the

scenes, sometimes known as a "support staff." Be kind and show respect to the transportation director, custodial staff, maintenance department, IT people, administrative assistants, etc. These people are the backbone of any great organization and can either make your day smooth so you can stay focused on the more music-related aspects of your job, or they can make your day a nightmare of logistical issues. Being a good person all the time to everyone is just a good rule of thumb for life, but it can be easy to overlook people that make your day-to-day life as easy as a support staff makes it.

10. FIND A MENTOR:

Almost every young ensemble director will have huge aspirations for their ensemble, and it can be easy to let your personal goals overshadow the actual needs of your group. Having an older, knowledgeable mentor will allow you to have someone to toss ideas around with and get information that only a person who has had many years doing what you are doing can help you avoid obstacles only a seasoned veteran would know. Things like deadlines for marching competitions/solo & ensemble come up much quicker than one might think. Funding for band trips might be trickier than one would have ever imagined. Scheduling marching band rehearsals might involve numerous administrative people and athletic coaches. Fortunately, most musicians and music educators enjoy helping each other. Your "rival band" might have a director who could be the most helpful person to you because "rival programs" often do similar activities and are in the same district with the same deadlines and policies.

Dr. Brad Meyer (www.Brad-Meyer.com) is a percussion educator, artist, and composer with an extensive and diverse background. He is the Director of Percussion Studies at Stephen F. Austin State University (Nacogdoches, TX). Dr. Meyer has been an active presenter/performer at numerous festivals and conventions, including: Midwest Band & Orchestra Clinic, Texas Music Educators Association's national convention, Percussive Arts Society's International Convention, and many others. He has written several compositions for snare drum, multi-percussion, and percussion ensemble published through Bachovich Publications.

Dr. Meyer is a proud endorsee of Yamaha Instruments, Zildjian Cymbals, Vic Firth Sticks and Mallets, Evans Drumheads, and Tycoon Percussion.